

# HIV/AIDS in Vietnam and USAID Involvement

The first HIV/AIDS case in Vietnam was detected in 1990 in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). Since then, this Southeast Asian nation has seen its HIV/AIDS epidemic expand steadily, with prevalence reaching 0.24 percent of the adult population by the end of 1999. Injecting drug use accounts for approximately 65 percent of all HIV infections in Vietnam. Men account for approximately 85 percent of AIDS cases.

Factors placing Vietnam at risk of rapid spread of HIV/AIDS include: high levels of injecting drug use, high levels of sexually transmitted infections, a thriving commercial sex industry, low condom use, frequent population migration, little public discussion about HIV/AIDS, and pervasive stigma attached to AIDS. HIV infection has thus far spread to rural and remote areas, along transport routes, and along drug trafficking routes.

By the end of 1999, HIV/AIDS cases had been reported in each of Vietnam's 61 provinces. Estimates of the epidemic's scope vary by source. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP):

- By the end of 1999, an estimated 100,000 adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS.
- UNDP estimates that an additional 300,000 to 350,000 people will be infected with HIV over the next five years (2001-2006).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau:

- In Hai Phong City, HIV prevalence in injecting drug users rose from less than 1 percent between 1994 and 1997 to 64 percent in 1999. From 1994 to 1999 in Da Nang, prevalence levels among injecting drug users fluctuated between 14 and 80 percent; in Nha Trang City, prevalence ranged from 52 to 90 percent.
- In 1999, 5 percent of sex workers in Ho Chi Minh City were HIV-positive.
- From 1992 to 1999, HIV prevalence among patients with sexually transmitted infections in Hai Phong City rose from less than 1 percent to 6 percent.



- HIV prevalence among pregnant women in Hai Phong City and Ho Chi Minh City remained well below 1 percent during the 1990s.
- Prevalence among persons receiving blood transfusions ranged from below 1 percent to almost 2 percent between 1996 and 1998.

According to the Vietnamese National AIDS Committee (NAC):

- By the end of year 2000, 135,000 to 160,000 Vietnamese had contracted HIV.
- As of May 2001, a cumulative total of 34,000 people had been officially diagnosed as HIV-positive, but this is estimated to represent only 10 percent of the total number of Vietnamese actually infected with the disease.
- Seventy to 80 percent of HIV-infected persons in the Northern and Southern provinces are younger than 30.
- HIV/AIDS prevalence among army recruits rose from 0 percent to 0.15 percent in 1998.

## NATIONAL RESPONSE

Vietnam has responded quickly to HIV/AIDS and has been credited for developing and implementing prevention programs in the epidemic's early stages. In 1990, the National AIDS Committee was created to guide national HIV/AIDS prevention and care

policies and planning. Through this mechanism, the government developed both a Short-Term Plan (1989-90) and a Medium-Term Plan (1991-93) on HIV/AIDS.

In 1993, both a second Medium-Term Plan, developed by the Ministry of Health, and a National Strategic Plan for Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS (1994-2000), developed by the National AIDS Committee, were adopted. In 1995, the government first enacted legislation on HIV/AIDS control.

Vietnam's response to HIV/AIDS has been influenced by parallel legislation aimed at controlling the commercial sex industry and reducing drug use. Because commercial sex activity and drug use grew dramatically in the 1990s, along with the country's HIV/AIDS epidemic, legislative efforts were launched to address all three areas simultaneously.

Vietnam's 2000-2005 Strategy on AIDS Prevention and Control aims to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among the general population, slow the transition from HIV infection to AIDS, and reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on socioeconomic development.

The NAC is currently chaired by the Vice Prime Minister, reflecting high-level government commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

The Government has made a concerted effort to combat AIDS, allocating US \$4.3 million dollars in 2000 to fight the epidemic. Government initiatives are aimed at improving surveillance and blood

Key Population, Health, and Socioeconomic Indicators		
Population	78 million	DHS 2000
Growth Rate	1.4%	DHS 2000
Life Expectancy	Male: 63 Female: 69	DHS 2000
Total Fertility Rate	2.5	DHS 2000
Infant Mortality Rate	37 per 1,000 live births	DHS 2000
Maternal Mortality Ratio	160 per 100,000 live births	DHS 2000
GNP per capita (US\$)	350	DHS 2000
Govt. health expenditure as % GDP	4.8%	WHO 1997
Adult Literacy	Male: 95% Female: 91%	World Bank 2000

safety, prevention and care of sexually transmitted infections, harm reduction for injecting drug users, and care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS. A national HIV/AIDS education campaign is also underway, but funding shortfalls have limited the campaign's reach.

## **USAID SUPPORT**

The **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** does not have a mission in Vietnam, but is providing \$2.2 million in FY2001 through a regional program.

USAID-supported nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in Vietnam include the following:

- **Family Health International (FHI)** supports behavioral sentinel surveillance, situational analyses, capacity building for provincial AIDS committees, condom social marketing, drop-in centers for injecting drug users, peer counseling for sex workers, and upgrading of health provider skills to diagnose and treat sexually transmitted infections. In addition, FHI is implementing a cross-border project with mobile populations at high risk of HIV infection, including transport workers, miners and other migrant workers, military troops, refugees and women who trade sex in tourist and transit areas.
- **NGO Networks** (a consortium of CARE International, PATH, and Save the Children/U.S.) is developing work-based HIV/AIDS interventions in Lao Cao province.
- **The Population Council** has supported a research project on youths' decision-making in health and HIV/AIDS prevention, an AIDS information music video and theater project, and a workplace-based HIV/AIDS prevention program for mobile construction workers.

Other bilateral donors include the European Union, Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, France, and Norway. United Nations agencies are also involved in HIV/AIDS programming in Vietnam.

## **CHALLENGES**

According to UNAIDS and the Ministry of Health, Vietnam faces the following challenges in containing its HIV/AIDS epidemic:

- Expanding HIV/AIDS education programs to reach at-risk, youth, and rural populations;
- Providing improved training to medical staff and researchers on HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment;
- Reducing social stigma and increasing public awareness and dialogue on HIV/AIDS issues;
- Increasing condom use to prevent HIV/AIDS; and
- Expanding international cooperation in HIV/AIDS prevention and control and increasing donor funding.

## SELECTED LINKS AND CONTACTS

1. Vietnam Ministry of Health, 138A Giang Vo Street, Hanoi, Vietnam, Minister: Do Nguyen Phuong, Tel: 262970
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